

14 JUN 1970

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# The Anatomy of a Rumor... Even Denials Feed Its Spread

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—Phillip (Flip) Webster, a student at Towson (Md.) State College, learned about it from a flyer that was being passed out around the Johns Hopkins University campus.

Rands Lynn Byrne, a junior at Michigan State University, heard about it from Clyde Morris, her communications professor, who had heard about it from a friend who had a clipping from a paper in Portland, Ore.

Harvard chemistry Professor George Kistiakowski, who was science adviser to President Eisenhower, heard about it from some people who had picked up the rumor in North Carolina.

Peter Burchyns, a graduate student, heard two students at Stanford University talking about it after seeing it in the Wall Street Journal.

Kathryn Bennett heard it at a neighborhood meeting in Minneapolis from someone who had read it in the Village Voice.

What each heard, along with thousands—perhaps millions—of others across the country, was the rumor that the Nixon administration had hired the Rand Corp., a super "think tank" in Santa Monica, to study the possibilities of canceling the American election in 1972.

Rand, which does 80 percent of its work for the defense department, has categorically denied the report. But the rumor continues to circulate. It got to the point that last weekend, White House counselor Daniel P. Moynihan felt obliged to dwell on it at length in his commencement address. He called the persistence of the rumor symptomatic of the "fact that mistrust of government had reached epidemic proportions."

hand has received widely read among the left. Despite this, the rumor hundreds of letters and The Voice ran it on April 18, queries continue to pour phone calls on the matter citing the Newhouse stories into Rand—most of them from all over the country—as its source. from university communi-

The Wall St. Journal but-les. sors, students and house- The first version came hard to spike—that the stuff and if he had it to do quash the reports in every White House, and printed reau, author or the original instance, but, in the words the following item in its "Newscope" item, now says, of Jack Vogel, communica- Washington Wire column on "We have not been able to tions director, "I don't think April 24 (which, through substantiate this story since we've seen the end of this fluke, ran only in the West—we printed it." He added thing yet. It's just gone na- and Midwest editions): that Newscope is usually tional."

The first version came hard to spike—that the stuff and if he had it to do from the Washington bu- Rand Corp. 'think tank' is again he would not have reau of the Newhouse News studying the idea of cancel- printed the item. ling the 1972 presidential "I thought while the item elections if radicals threaten was startling in certain re- to disrupt it." spects it wasn't going to

By now, the rumor was shake anybody out of the hot and spreading. The trees the way it did," he 100,000 circulation under said.

ground sheet, the Los Ange- Howard said that a New- les Free Press, ran it with house reporter had picked front page headlines: syndi- up the rumor in New York, cated columnist Irv Kupel- but he would not say how or net used it in his Chicago where.

Sun-Times column; The Na- "We're the ones who put- tion magazine included it in it out," Howard added, "but an editorial entitled, "In- the real problem is the way frastructure of Repression." it was interpreted and Interestingly, most of the twisted around by others."

national press—including Rand president Rowen Time, Newsweek, the New speculated that the election York Times and The Wash- study rumor thrived because ington Post—and television of "a heightened sense of stayed away from the anxiety" in the country and rumor, at least until Moyni- "a widespread feeling that han openly discussed it in government is not to be his address at Fordham Uni- trusted."

versity. "Why should they believe the governmental denials or outlets who printed the re- anybody else's?" he asked.

Moreover, many of the governmental denials or outlets who printed the re- anybody else's?" he asked. A second factor, in the port also carried the denial view of Karl Taeuber, a soci- of Rand president Henry S. Rowen, that the institution ologist at Rand on leave "has not undertaken such a consin, is Rand's reputation study; it does not contem- among new lefters as an in- plate making such a study; from the University of Wis- nor has it been approached strument of the war ma- by anyone with a proposal chine.

The item ran in at least a for such a study."

Rowan repeated this to a on," he said, "because reporter, adding that Rand there's something mysteri- had searched its files back ous about it. It does superse- three years for something cret work for the military, that might be construed or and dagger connotations, mis- anything anyway."

mored study. "There was Some people are convinced nothing," he insisted. "Dis- that Rand is going to deny- sence, elections or vio- Dr. Clyde Morris, a pro- fessor of communications at subject we are working on," Michigan State University,

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